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Influence of phonics teaching on young EFL learners' pronunciation

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Dedicated
to Alessandro, Stefano and Francesco, my dear sons
In memory of Andrea

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INFLUENCE OF PHONICS TEACHING ON YOUNG EFL LEARNERS' PRONUNCIATION

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS: phonetics, young learners, phonics teaching, pronunciation, phonemes, English as a foreign language

This study investigates the influence of phonics teaching on young EFL learners' pronunciation of the phonemes /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/ and /w/. The research project was carried out in a private primary school, over a period of three months and involved 16 learners from year 4. The data was gathered through pre-study and post-study audio recordings, pre-study and post-study assessment worksheets and a teacher's journal. Phonics instruction was provided to participants, after the implementation of the pre-study data collection tools. The phonics teaching included songs, gestures, tongue-twisters and activities to promote the identification of the phonemes in relation to their orthographic representations. The assessment worksheets and the audio recordings were analysed quantitively to verify how many learners could recognise and produce accurately the sounds addressed by this research. The weekly entries in the teacher's journal were analysed qualitatively. Results show that raising learners' awareness to phonemes and the use of phonics instruction can have a positive impact on the pronunciation of young EFL learners.

RESUMO

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: fonética, *young learners*, *phonics teaching*, pronúncia, fonemas, Inglês como lingua estrangeira

Este estudo investiga a influência do ensino de *phonics* na pronúncia dos fonemas /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/ e /w/ de aprendentes de Inglês no ensino primário. O projeto de investigação foi realizado numa escola primária privada, durante três meses e incluiu 16 aprendentes do 4º ano. Os dados foram recolhidos através de gravações áudio, realizadas antes e após o estudo; fichas de aferição, realizadas antes e após o estudo; e um diário do professor. A instrução de *phonics* foi dada aos participantes, depois da implementação dos instrumentos de recolha de dados prévios ao estudo. O ensino de *phonics* incluiu canções, gestos, trava-línguas e atividades para incentivar a identificação dos fonemas, relacionando-os com as suas representações ortográficas. As fichas de aferição e as gravações áudio foram analisadas quantitativamente para verificar quantos aprendentes podiam reconhecer ou produzir corretamente os sons abordados neste estudo. As entradas semanais no diário do professor foram analisadas qualitativamente. Os resultados revelam que sensibilizar os alunos para a consciência dos fonemas e o uso de *phonics teaching* pode ter um impacto positivo na pronúncia de aprendentes de inglês, em contexto do 1º Ciclo.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

L1 – First Language

L2 – Second Language

PA – Phonemic awareness

YL – Young Learner

INFLUENCE OF PHONICS TEACHING ON YOUNG EFL LEARNERS' PRONUNCIATION

Introduction

Pronunciation concerns the way words are pronounced in a language. It is divided in two levels: segmental and supra-segmental. The segmental level refers to the phonemes. Kelly (2000: 1) defines phonemes as "the different sounds within a language". These phonemes are divided in consonants sounds and vowels sounds. The supra-segmental features include intonation, stress and rhythm. Kelly (2000: 11) stresses the importance of teaching pronunciation, since mispronunciation can cause problems in communication, claiming that this breakdown of communication "can be very frustrating for the learner who may have a good command of grammar and lexis". Although, according to the same author, pronunciation teaching tends to be neglected by teachers and it is usually "done in response to errors which students make in the classroom", the author claims that pronunciation "can, and should, be planned" (13).

It is widely considered that there are several factors affecting pronunciation. Kenworthy (1987: 4) highlights that the native language; the amount of exposure to L2; the phonetic ability; the motivation, attitude and identity; and the learner's age can influence it. Regarding the last factor, it has been argued that young learners can reach better pronunciation than adults (Brewster, Ellis, and Girard, 2002, Ioup, 2008). Furthermore, teachers should take advantage of young learners' willingness to talk, as well as the fact that they feel less embarrassment about mistakes (Cameron, 2005), to provide practise in pronunciation in order to decrease the possibility of letting them fossilize incorrect pronunciation habits. Primary school years can be the ideal moment to foster learners' pronunciation skills and enable them to be more confident and fluent users of English at subsequent school levels, when learners tend to be feel more embarrassed about their mistakes.

On the other hand, Cameron (2005: 67) also claims that although in young learners' EFL classrooms the focus should be on oral interaction, when children master their literacy skills in L1 "written language can be functionally more useful" and can

assist language learning. In addition, Basseti (2009: 193) argues that the written input "provides a visual and permanent analysis of the auditory input" which can assist the perception of sounds helping learners "to produce phonemes they have difficulties perceiving". However, when the L2 written input is converted in phonemes it can be affected by the interference of L1 orthography.

During my teaching practise I have noticed that although some learners can naturally perceive and produce sounds that are not present in the Portuguese phonological system, other learners have more difficulties. In addition, although there are some young learners who when exposed to the written input can remember better how to realize the phoneme, there are other learners who mispronounce the words when exposed to their orthographic input. Exploring strategies to help learners to improve pronunciation, I found several studies about phonics teaching, as will be further analysed in the literature review. According to Cameron (2005: 149), phonics teaching "focuses on letter-sound relations". Bearing in mind that the written input can scaffold language learning and that phonics teaching promotes the association between letters and sounds, the aim of this action research was to focus on the use of phonics teaching as a means to develop young learners' phonemic awareness of English sounds, in order to improve their pronunciation skills in terms of perception and production of phonemes. In fact, my action research aims to address the following question:

1. How will using phonics teaching influence my young learners' pronunciation of the sounds /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/ and /w/?

This section introduces the topic of my study. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the literature related to the topic of my project. Chapter 2 provides information about the action research project. The first section introduces the context, section 2 describes the chosen methodology and section 3 presents the results. Finally, section 4 discusses the results of the qualitative and quantitative tools I implemented and it also provides a discussion and a conclusion.

Chapter I. Literature Review

The literature review of this research project aims to provide a synthesis of the theoretical and empirical literature published in the field of the scope of my project. Firstly, I will address the topic of pronunciation and its relationship to young EFL learners. Secondly, I will focus on the literature related to pronunciation and reading. Afterwards, I will give an overview of the research related to phonics teaching, especially regarding young EFL learners. Finally, I will briefly address the issue of pronunciation in Portugal.

I. 1 Young learners and pronunciation

As stated in the introduction, pronunciation is frequently neglected by EFL teachers. However, it is very important because incorrect pronunciation can hamper communication, obstructing the message conveying, which can be frustrating for learners. Yates (2002: 1) defines pronunciation as "the production of sounds that we use to make meaning". According to Underhill (2005: 49), the pronunciation of a word consists "of a flow of sound rather than a sequence of fixed sounds". However, the phonologic system of a language, containing its available sounds, is the basis of pronunciation. The segmentation of a seamless flow into minimal units of sound allows learners to detect the distinction between different sounds. In fact, in order to develop pronunciation skills, teachers should provide practise in the production of L2 and also provide practise primarily in the reception of L2, promoting noticing activities to make learners aware of the perception of those "foreign" sounds. Indeed, Ioup (2008: 44) claims that "difficulty in producing new sounds is often attributed to imperfect perceptual ability".

It has been argued that in terms of pronunciation children could reach a higher level of proficiency in EFL than older learners. Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (2002: 21), refer to studies stating that "lower-order processes, like pronunciation, are learned better when young". In addition, according to the research carried out by Ioup (2008: 46) on the correlation between age and the acquisition of L2 phonology, the author states that "it appears that younger is better in acquiring the phonology of a L2". However, Kenworthy (1987), Lightbown & Spada (2006) and Ioup (2008) stress that

several factors must be taken into account, for instance phonetic ability, amount of exposure to L2, individual cognitive variables or interference with L1 language. Regarding the last factor, Ohala (2008: 35) proposes that "the influence of the native language on the production of speech sounds is clearly something that strongly affects the production of L2 sounds".

As mentioned in the introduction, YLs are naturally talkative, enjoying communication activities, and can be less embarrassed about mistakes (Cameron, 2005). In fact, Johnstone (2002: 12) argues that unlike older learners YL may be less "language anxious". Furthermore, this author adds that young learners "are likely to find it easier to acquire a good command of the sound system of the language", including intonation. Traditionally, EFL learners learn pronunciation through imitation, not only through drillings but also through games, songs, chants or rhymes, and Read (2007: 182) stresses that besides providing practise of sounds; songs, chants and rhymes help children to develop "awareness of stress, rhythm and intonation".

I. 2 Pronunciation and reading

Reading conveys three different categories of information: visual information, phonological information and semantic information. Cameron (2005: 125) explains that reading is not merely understanding the meaning or decoding the letters, it also involves the "phonological information from the sounds those symbols (letters) make when spoken". Furthermore, according to the same author, when YLs literacy skills in L1 are developed the written input can be useful in the language learning.

In addition, Basseti (2009) argues that unlike L1 acquisition, which is exclusively auditory, L2 acquisition is frequently assisted by written input. This author states that there is evidence that the written input "can help L2 learners produce target L2 pronunciations" (Basseti, 2009: 193), improving the perceptions of sounds. However, English is not a transparent language, in which a letter corresponds to a specific sound. In fact, the 44 sounds of English are represented by only 26 letters and the relationship between letters and sounds (grapho-phonemic) in English is not very reliable (Cameron, 2005).

Bearing in mind the opacity of the English language and, as stated in the introduction, the interference of L1 orthography, Basseti (2009: 193) highlights that it is important to bear in mind that the orthographic input "can also lead to some non-targetlike pronunciations". These non-target pronunciations can result in sound additions, omissions or substitutions. The inclusion of the sound /ʃ/ in my project was precisely because the orthographic representation of that sound in Portuguese is "ch", which can lead to an incorrect pronunciation of words like, for instance, *church* or *couch*.

I.3 Phonics teaching in young EFL classrooms

There has been a great debate about the methods to develop literacy skills. On one hand, the defenders of the whole language perspective stress that the development of reading skills should focus on meaning rather than on the analysis of sounds. In fact, Krashen (2001: 17) argues that concerning L1 "many children with low PA (phonemic awareness) appear to have no problem in learning to read". Krashen (2011: 3) extends the previous opinion to the development of reading skills in L2 learners, stating that "PA training has not been shown to be a prerequisite to learning to read in first language or second language development or even to be helpful". On the other hand, a great number of findings support the use of phonological and phonemic awareness strategies to promote the development of reading skills in L1. According to Tunmer (1997: 27), phonological awareness "refers to the ability to perform mental operations on the output of the mechanism that converts the acoustic signal into a sequence of phonemes". Phonemic awareness, a constituent of the phonological awareness, is defined by Yopp and Yopp (2009: 2) as "the ability to attend to and manipulate phonemes" in the spoken word.

Phonics instruction promotes the increase of learners' awareness allowing them to perceive the sounds in association with letters, integrating phonemic awareness. According to Doty, Hixson, Decker, Reynolds, & Drevon (2015: 503) phonics instruction teaches learners "the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language". Although phonics teaching is mostly used to improve literacy skills in L1, there are examples of the use of this methodology in EFL

classrooms to improve either reading or pronunciation skills. Ibarrola (2007) suggests the use of phonics instruction in EFL primary school contexts to improve not only reading comprehension but also pronunciation.

In line with Ibarrola's suggestion, Tomás (2016) carried out a study applying phonics instruction to 25 phonemes. The study included 50 Spanish participants, aged 5 and 6 years old. One of the aims of this study was to verify if there were differences in perception and production of English sounds after phonics teaching. According to the results, phonics teaching assisted the phonological production of sounds, improving pronunciation. In addiction, according to a study carried out by Beltrán-Herrera, Andrade-Chávez, and Álvarez-Rojas (2016) an improvement in terms of pronunciation was achieved by young EFL learners using phonics instruction. This study focused on the contrast of sounds /θ/-/ð/ and /I/-/I:/ and included 13 participants, aged from 10 to 12 years old. Furthermore, Martinez (2011) carried out a study about the use of explicit phonics instructions in EFL classrooms, aiming to identify if it had positive effects on literacy of the 85 participants, from first grade, attending bilingual school. The author concluded that young learners' pronunciation skills improved when reading. Besides the previous studies, Nasrawi & Al-Jamal (2017) investigated the impact of Jolly Phonics methodology on reading skills. The participants were 58 young Jordanian EFL learners from first grade. Half of the participants received phonics instruction for five weeks; the other half received the traditional strategy. The authors concluded that the experiment group improved their reading achievements. Finally, Yeung, Siegel & Chan (2012) conducted a study seeking to examine the relationship between phonological awareness and reading development. The study was undertaken during 12 weeks, involving 76 participants, aged 4 to 6. According to the results from learners in the experiment group, instruction on phonological awareness was beneficial to some extend in the reading and spelling of young Chinese EFL learners.

I. 4 Teaching of pronunciation in Portugal

Literature related to pronunciation difficulties of Portuguese learners is scarce. Although Shepherd (1991), catalogues some of the pronunciation problems Portuguese learners must cope with when learning English, it is important to point out

that his study focuses principally on Brazilian Portuguese. The author highlights four consonant phonemes which are addressed by my project, since according to my teaching experience those are tricky sounds for learners: /dʒ/, /tʃ/, initial /h/ and /θ/. These sounds have no equivalents in the Portuguese phonological system and they are more difficult to perceive and produce by learners. The initial /h/ usually suffers a phoneme omission, for example learners produce the utterance ead, instead of /h/ead. However, as stated by Shepherd (1991: 92), this sound can also suffer phoneme addition "because of overcompensation". As an example, learners can produce the utterance /h/arm, instead of arm. On the other hand, the sounds /dʒ/, /tʃ/ and /θ/ usually experience phoneme substitution. The sound /dʒ/ can be pronounced by learners as /ʒ/, leading to an utterance like /ʒ/iraffe, instead of /dʒ/iraffe. The sound /tʃ/ can be pronounced as /ʃ/ and learners can produce the utterance /ʃ/eese instead of /tʃ/eese. The sound /θ/ can be produced by learners either as /s/ or /t/, resulting in utterances like bir/s/day instead of bir/θ/day or /t/ree instead of /θ/ree.

In Portugal, few researchers have addressed young EFL learners' pronunciation issues and phonics teaching. Although some Primary English course books include phonics teaching, for instance Smileys 3 and Smiles 4 (Dooley & Evans, 2016), Stars Year 3 and 4 (Lindade, Botelho & Lucas, 2016), other course books do not include these kinds of activities, namely Let's Rock year 3 and 4 (Abreu & Esteves, 2016). However, according to the national curriculum - *Metas Curriculares de Inglês do 1º Ciclo* (Bravo, Cravo & Duarte, 2014: 9) - at Year 3 learners should identify sounds, intonations and the rhythms of English by comparing them with those of their mother tongue.

I. 5 Summary of the literature review

Bearing in mind the findings of my research for this literature review, the ability to distinguish sounds through listening is a precondition required to produce sounds, both in L1 and L2 (Ioup, 2009). In fact, we cannot produce sounds that we cannot perceive. Hence, learning to hear and encourage learners to notice the sounds can be fundamental strategies to develop their pronunciation skills, and raising young

learners' awareness through phonics might have a positive impact on pronunciation (Ibarrola,2007; Tomás, 2016; Beltrán-Herrera et al.,2016; Martinez, 2011). Indeed, it can be assumed that phonics teaching, which encourages learners to notice the sounds in combination with a letter or clusters (Doty et al., 2015), can be a strategy to scaffold pronunciation skills, helping learners to remember the correct pronunciation of words and influencing positively their pronunciation skills (Bassetti, 2009). Furthermore, it can help learners to be able to pronounce new written words they might encounter as autonomous learners, considering that written English language is not phonological transparent (Cameron, 2005).

Chapter II. Action research

II. 1 Context

My action research project was carried out at a private school in Oeiras, Lisbon, Portugal. This is a small primary school, located in a residential neighbourhood, with learners from pre-school to 4th grade. The school is a two-floor family house adapted as a school, therefore one of the main issues to take into account when planning the lessons was the space constraint inside the classroom. However, there was a garden and a playground, as well as a small gym, where activities could be done.

The group involved in this project was a 4th grade class of 16 learners, 10 boys and 6 girls, aged from 9 to 10 years old. The learners were all Portuguese native speakers and there were no special educational needs learners. They were very well behaved which helped to overcome the space constraint mentioned above. Although English is compulsory only from the 3rd grade, most learners had been learning English since they were 5 years old. The lessons took place twice a week, one hour each lesson. This project was carried out from October to December, 2017.

The course book adopted by the school was Smiles 4 (Dooley & Evans, 2016). Although the annual planning of classes was carried out according to the themes in the course book, during my practicum I designed or adapted some of the materials and activities to be used by learners in order to put in practise my action research project.

As stated in the literature review, the Portuguese national curriculum includes pronunciation in the scope of skills to develop in Year 3 and 4. On the one hand, it stresses that in year 3 learners should identify different sounds, intonations and the rhythms of English by comparing them with the ones of their mother tongue (Bravo et al., 2014: 9). On the other hand, it highlights that at Year 3 learners should produce sounds, intonations and the rhythms of English; repeating letters and sounds; as well as familiar and memorised words. In addition, they should pronounce with some intelligibility familiar words and repeat (year 3) and say (year 4) rhymes, chants and songs (Bravo et al., 2014: 10).

II. 2 Methodology

Bearing in mind the concept of triangulation (Mertler, 2012), multiple sources of data collection were adopted, using both quantitative and qualitative research tools. As a qualitative data collection instrument, weekly teaching journal entries were used. As quantitative instruments, audio recording (recording the utterances produced by learners, using both pictures and written words as prompts) and assessment worksheets were implemented.

II. 2.1 Letters of consent

During September, consent was obtained from the school director, the learners and the parents (Appendices A, B and C). Learners were informed about the purpose of the study. I explained to learners that they were going to learn songs, gestures and symbols of sounds that were difficult to pronounce in English. In addition, I told them they were going to complete some worksheets and be audio-recorded. Although the learners' letters of consent considered whether they wanted to participate or not in the study, all learners decided to participate, adopting a code name, to maintain their anonymity. Because this group of students had already participated in a project last year, both parents and learners were familiar with the procedures.

II. 2.2 Phonics teaching

Materials were designed or adapted to carry out the phonics teaching. Six songs from Jolly Phonics (Lloyd & Wernham, 2017), of sounds /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/

and /w/, were used, adapting the gestures. The songs and the description of the gesture associated to each sound can be consulted in appendix D. In addition, three tongue twisters were adapted and three tongue-twisters were designed, addressing especially the selected sounds (Appendix E). Although my action research project addressed especially the segmental level of pronunciation, the tongue twisters and songs I used during the project also provided practice in supra-segmental features. In fact, the decision to use tongue-twisters and songs followed the advice of Brewster et al. (2002: 78), who remind teachers that to increase awareness of sounds when teaching ESL to young learners, they should use strategies converted "into more game-like activities". Furthermore, these authors claim that besides the practise of individual sounds, tongue twister and songs provide practise in connected speech, stress, rhythm, intonation, as well as "ear training" (p. 164).

Each week a new sound was introduced and the previous sounds were practised using everyday activities. The lesson plan describing the phonics teaching methodology of sound /tʃ/ can be consulted in appendix F. The six sounds addressed by my study followed the same structure. Firstly, learners' awareness was raised through elicitation, in order to highlight the sound we were going to learn and practise. As soon as the sound was identified by learners, I played the Jolly phonics song (Lloyd & Wernham, 2017) related to that sound, teaching them the gesture associated to the sound (Appendix D). Afterwards, I provided practise in singing the song related to the sound, making the gesture each time they identified or produced the sound. Then, a tongue twister containing the addressed sound was presented to learners, providing learners the written input of the sound and relating it to a letter or a cluster (see appendix E). After practising the tongue twister, while making the gesture each time the sound was produced, learners were asked to colour the letters related to a specific sound. In order to provide further practise, in subsequent lessons learners were asked to identify the sounds already taught by producing and identifying them in everyday activities in class, for instance singing the routine songs, saying ordinal numbers or the parts of the body. In addition, learners were asked to indentify the sounds and circle the cluster of letters related to those sounds when they were reading or writing

vocabulary, chants or poems (Appendix G). The Jolly phonics songs and the tongue twisters were repeated in several classes.

II. 2.3 Data collection tools

II. 2.3.1 Audio recording

An audio recording of each learner was carried out before the implementation of the research. This pre-study audio recording was carried out outside the classroom, individually. As input, individual words illustrated through pictures and sentences were used containing the phonemes /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/ and /w/. The pictures and sentences can be consulted in appendix H. The pictures were related to words familiar to learners and the written sentences contained familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary. Bearing in mind that some learners could not remember the vocabulary from pictures, the set of written sentences contained the vocabulary from pictures. Learners were told that in the sentences they could find the vocabulary related to the pictures.

The audio recordings were carried out according to the following procedure. Firstly, learners were asked to look at two pictures containing a specific sound and to produce the words. Afterwards, they were asked to read and pronounce four sentences related to the same sound. If learners could not produce the word illustrated by the pictures, after reading the sentences, they were asked to look again at the pictures and say the words. Then, a new sound was audio recorded, following the same procedure. In order to help the data processing the vocabulary was gathered according to the sound. Soon after audio recording all the utterances of a particular sound, the utterances of another sound were audio recorded.

After the implementation of the phonics teaching, each learner was audio recorded, outside the classroom, individually. Vocabulary from the pre-study audio recording was used. In addition, this audio recording included three new sentences with vocabulary that learners were not familiar with, in order to assess if the phonics teaching helped to improve pronunciation of new written words learners' might encounter as autonomous learners. The pictures and sentences can be consulted in appendix I. The audio recording of each sound was executed following the pre-study

procedures. Pictures illustrating the sentences were used to help learners to infer the meaning of the three new sentences containing unfamiliar words.

The audio recordings were analysed from a quantitative perspective, assessing how many learners could or could not produce accurately the phonemes. In addition, the audio recordings were also analysed from a qualitative perspective, verifying in what position the sounds were more difficult to produce: initial position, middle position or final position.

II. 2.3.2 Recognition of sounds worksheets

In order to assess the learners' ability to identify vocabulary containing the phonemes /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/ and /w/, a pre-study test and a post-study test were conducted. The pre-study test (see appendix J) was carried out before the implementation of the phonics teaching and contained pictures of words familiar to learners. Learners received and completed six worksheets, separately, each one relating to a sound, containing 4 pictures each. The lesson plan describing the method can be consulted in appendix K. Learners were informed that they had to listen to the words and identify the ones containing the sound I was going to produce, and circle the pictures containing that sound. The post-study worksheet (see appendix L) contained 6 to 7 pictures of familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary, labelled with the written words. Learners had to look, read and circle the words containing the sounds, according to the phonetic symbol. The results were analysed quantitatively, verifying how many learners were able to identify the sounds in the pre-study test and in the post-study test.

II. 2.3.3 Teacher's journal

A teacher's journal allows teachers to reflect on events or ideas and triggers a deeper understanding about teaching (Richards and Lockhart, 1996). Bearing this fact in mind, notes were written weekly on a teacher's journal (Appendix M), focusing especially on pronunciation issues, either verifying progress or potential problems related to learners' pronunciation of the selected sounds. Furthermore, it allowed me to reflect about how the implementation of the research was being carried out. The entries were analysed qualitatively. While the research project was being carried out,

the learners' reactions to phonics teaching encouraged a reflection and an adjustment of the methodology, and the notes taken in the teacher's journal provided data which is transcribed in the next section. The following section will present the results gathered during the action research.

II. 3 Results

From October to December 2017, I carried out an action research project hoping to have a better understanding of my young learners' pronunciation issues. The objective was to identify how the use of phonics teaching could influence the pronunciation of young EFL learners. In order to limit the scope of the research I focused on the sounds /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/ and /w/. This section aims to present and analyse the results of the data collected through the quantitative and qualitative tools. Firstly, analysis is focused on the audio recordings. Then, the data gathered through the assessment worksheets, with the aim of assessing the recognition of sounds by learners, is analysed. Finally, the results of the entries in my teacher's journal, obtained through observation, is analysed from a qualitative perspective.

II. 3.1 Audio recordings

As described in the previous section, a total of 16 YLs were audio recorded before and after the implementation of phonics teaching, individually, outside the classroom. The following tables present the results of the pre-study and post-study audio recordings, by sounds. The input column refers to the strategy to elicit the pronunciation; picture or sentence. The empty cells refer to those words which were not audio recorded in the pre-study.

As shown in Table 1, the results of learners´ pronunciation of the sound /dʒ/ in familiar vocabulary scarcely improved from pre-study to post-study. More than 75% of learners correctly pronounced the word *jacket*, when prompted by a picture and the words *jacket*, *jump* and *June* when prompted by a sentence in the pre-study and this value rose to 81% in the post-study. However it is interesting to notice that although the words *giraffe* and *orange* are also familiar to learners, in the pre-study fewer than half of the learners could pronounce the sound correctly. After the phonics teaching

Table 1: Analysis of the audio recording of sound /dʒ/

INPUT	*WORD*	*PRE-STUDY*	*POST-STUDY*
picture	giraffe	7 students (44%)	14 students (88%)
	jacket	13 students (81 %)	16 students (100 %)
	orange	9 students (56%)	12 students (75%)
sentence	jacket	12 students (75%)	15 students (94%)
	giraffe	6 students (38%)	13 students (81%)
	orange	11 students (69%)	13 students (81%)
	jump	12 students (75%)	13 students (81%)
	June	13 students (81%)	14 students (88%)
	Jessica		14 students (88%)
	Jack		16 students (100 %)
	jungle		15 students (94%)
	gym		14 students (88%)
	vegetables		5 students (31%)
	juice		14 students (88%)

the pronunciation of these two words increased to 88 % and 75%, respectively, when prompted by a picture. Using the written input, correct pronunciation of this sound in the word *giraffe* increased from 38% to 81%. A possible explanation for the low results in the pre-study could be, as stated in the literature review, the interference of L1 (Basseti, 2009; Ohala, 2008), especially in the case of *giraffe* because it is similar to the Portuguese word. In fact, in the production of the utterances prompted by sentences, this phoneme was substituted by the phoneme/ʒ/, which is represented by the graphemes “g” and “j” leading to mispronunciations such as oran/ʒ/e and /ʒ/iraffe.

On the other hand, regarding the unfamiliar words added in the post-study audio-recording, learners showed a good performance. More than 80% of learners correctly pronounced the phoneme, except on the word *vegetables*, containing the sound in the middle position.

As can be observed in Table 2, although most learners could pronounce the phoneme /ʃ/ of familiar words in the pre-study, either elicited by pictures or written input, the number of learners able to pronounce those words after the phonics teaching rose, in two cases to 100%. However, in the pre-study audio recording 5 learners could only remember the word *shoes* after being exposed to its written input.

Table 2: Analysis of the audio recording of sound /ʃ/

INPUT	*WORD*	*PRE-STUDY*	*POST-STUDY*
picture	fish	16 students (100%)	16 students (100%)
	shoes	12 students (75 %)	13 students (81 %)
	sharpener		14 students (88%)
sentence	fish	14 students (88%)	16 students (100%)
	shoes	11 students (69%)	14 students (88%)
	sharpener	14 students (88%)	16 students (100%)
	shark	11 students (69 %)	15 students (94 %)
	washing		15 students (94 %)
	dish		11 students (69%)
	she		16 students (100 %)
	shouting		13 students (81 %)

It was also interesting to notice that although the sound /ʃ/ is also present in the Portuguese phonological system, one learner showed difficulties in the production of the sound even in Portuguese. In fact, this learner is receiving speech therapy. In the post-study audio-recording, the unfamiliar word *dish*, with the sound in the final position, was correctly pronounced by only 69% of learners. A possible explanation for this result could be because the sound was in the final position. However the remaining unfamiliar words - *shouting*, *washing* and *shark* - were correctly pronounced by 81% to 94% of learners.

Table 3: Analysis of the audio recording of sound /tʃ/

INPUT	*WORD*	*PRE-STUDY*	*POST-STUDY*
picture	chair	8 students (50%)	12 students (75 %)
	cheese	9 students (56%)	13 students (81 %)
	chocolate		15 students (94%)
sentence	chair	5 students (31%)	12 students (75 %)
	cheese	8 students (50%)	10 students (63%)
	chips	7 students (44%)	10 students (63%)
	couch	4 students (25%)	7 students (44%)
	children		10 students (63%)
	marching		5 students (31%)
	church		5 students (31%)
	cheetah		7 students (44%)

Table 3 demonstrates that learners had more difficulties pronouncing the sound /tʃ/, either prompted by pictures or written input. It is important to highlight that the Portuguese phonological system does not include this phoneme. In fact, the results from the pre-study were all below 56%. However the correct pronunciation of

the words from the pre-study increased to more than 50% after the phonics teaching, except the word *couch*, containing the sound in final position. In line with results presented in Tables 1 and 2, the unfamiliar words *marching* and *church*, which contains the sound in middle position and final position, were produced by only 31% of learners. Although some learners could the sound /tʃ/ in initial position for the word *church*, they could not produce the final position sound. I did not consider their answers correct.

Moreover, some learners needed to be exposed to the written input in order to remember the word. In the pre-study, 11 learners could not remember the word *cheese* and 8 learners could not remember the word *chair* when prompted by the pictures. In the post-study the written input was needed by 5 learners to remember the word *cheese* and by 6 learners to remember the word *chair*. In both audio recordings, after being exposed to the written input, learners who could pronounce the sound correctly when reading the sentences could pronounce it when exposed again to the picture. On the other hand, if learners did not pronounce the sound when reading, they did not pronounce it when exposed again to the picture. The implication of this result will be further discussed in the final section.

In the case of this phoneme it is important to bear in mind the interference of L1 orthography because the Portuguese grapheme "ch" corresponds to the phoneme/ʃ/. As highlighted by Basseti (2009), the L1 orthographic input can lead to non-target pronunciation.

Table 4: Analysis of the audio recording of sound /θ/

INPUT	***WORD***	***PRE-STUDY***	***POST-STUDY***
picture	three	1 students (6%)	3 students (19 %)
	mouth	11 students (68%)	15 students (94 %)
	tenth		15 students (94%)
sentence	three	0 students (0%)	5 students (31%)
	mouth	10 students (63%)	15 students (94%)
	tooth	5 students (31%)	7 students (44%)
	birthday	8 students (50%)	11 students (69%)
	third	3 students (19%)	5 students (31%)
	throwing		5 students (31%)
	thumbs		6 students (38%)
	toothbrush		3 students (19%)

The sound /θ/, analysed in Table 4, show low results of accurate pronunciation. In fact, the sound /θ/ does not exist in the Portuguese phonological system and it is often replaced by the sound /s/ or /f/. Although percentages of learners correctly producing this sound was low overall, results for the words *mouth* were above 60 %, either prompted by picture or written input. Probably this occurs because the topic of the human body is very familiar to learners and they may have already a phonological representation of the word. However, after the phonics teaching a small increase in the correct production of the sound in the words from the pre-study could be observed.

It was interesting to observe how learners became more aware of this sound during phonics teaching. Every lesson while saying the day of the week *Thursday* and the ordinal numbers of dates they spontaneously started to stress the sound. Despite this fact, in the post-study audio recording, only 31% and 38% of learners could pronounce correctly the phoneme in the unfamiliar words *throwing* and *thumbs*, prompted by sentences. The familiar word *three* and the unfamiliar word *toothbrush*, containing the sound in middle position, were correctly pronounced by only 19% of the learners. Unlike the previous example, the word *birthday*, with the sound at the same location, was produced by 69% of the learners. Perhaps because learners are very familiar with the word.

Table 5: Analysis of the audio recording of sound /h/

INPUT	***WORD***	***PRE-STUDY***	***POST-STUDY***
picture	house	6 students (38%)	11 students (69%)
	hat	8 students (50%)	15 students (94%)
	hand		13 students (81%)
sentence	house	7 students (44%)	10 students (63%)
	hat	4 students (25%)	10 students (63%)
	how	2 students (13%)	3 students (19%)
	hello	4 students (25%)	8 students (50%)
	happy	6 students (38%)	13 students (81%)
	hands		12 students (75 %)
	grasshoppers		2 students (13 %)
	hop		9 students (56%)
	hippos		10 students (63%)
	heavy		6 students (38%)

In addition to the sounds /tʃ/ and /θ/, the sound /h/, shown in Table 5, represents a challenge to Portuguese learners because it does not exist in the Portuguese phonological system. In addition, the grapheme "h" exits in the Portuguese alphabet but it is mute. This fact probably explains the low results in terms of production of the sound, since it can promote confusion and misunderstanding in young EFL learners. In the pre-study audio recording, fewer than half of the learners could produce the sound. During the phonics teaching, this was one of the sounds we focused on more and, in fact, the accurate production of the sound increased in the post-study audio recordings. However, the word *grasshoppers* containing the sound in the middle position was only produced correctly by two learners. The production of the word *how* was extremely low in both pre and post-study audio recordings, although learners produce and are exposed to the utterance *How are you?* in every lesson. A possible explanation could be the fact that, without noticing, teachers omit the sound /h/ when producing the utterance and the pronunciation error is fossilized.

Seven learners in the pre-study audio recordings, and three learners in the post-study, could not remember the word *house* when exposed to the picture. Six learners (pre-study) and four learners (post-study) could not remember the word *hat* elicited by a picture. However they recognised both words in the sentences and could produce them afterwards. This will be further discussed in the final section.

In the post-study audio recording, it was interesting to verify that Lion, who could only remember the word *house* after reading the sentences, when looking again to the picture produced the utterance with /h/, then without and finally with /h/. This could indicate that the phonics teaching increased his awareness to the sound.

According to the analysis of Table 6, the sound /w/ did not represent a challenge to young EFL learners. In both pre-study and post-study most learners could pronounce the sound, either elicited by pictures or written input. After the phonics teaching, all learners were able to pronounce six of the words probably because they were very familiar with the words. However, learners needed the written form of the word *witch*, provided in the sentences, in order to produce the word because they

Table 6: Analysis of the audio recording of sound /w/

INPUT	*WORD*	*PRE-STUDY*	*POST-STUDY*
picture	white	15 students (94%)	15 students (94%)
	swim	14 students (88%)	16 students (100 %)
	witch		16 students (100 %)
sentence	white	15 students (94%)	16 students (100 %)
	swim	14 students (88%)	16 students (100 %)
	winter	15 students (94%)	16 students (100 %)
	weather	13 students (81%)	14 students (88%)
	warm	15 students (94%)	14 students (88%)
	whales		13 students (81%)
	witch		16 students (100 %)
	twigs		12 students (75%)
	brown		14 students (88%)
	swans		14 students (88%)

could not remember it, even though this should be a familiar word because during the activities of Halloween the school promoted a "Witch's hats" contest in the school and learners practised the word. A probable reason to explain why learners could not remember the word is the fact that it is not practised in a daily basis. In these cases, the written input can assist the learning of the vocabulary, helping to activate the memory.

II. 3.2 Recognition of sounds worksheets

Before the audio recording and the phonics teaching, learners completed a worksheet (Appendix J) to assess their ability to recognise the sounds addressed by my research. After the phonics teaching learners completed a post-study worksheet (Appendix L). Besides the pictures and vocabulary from the pre-study worksheet, the post-study worksheet included pictures labelled with their written forms and unfamiliar vocabulary which required the use of the skills gained through phonics teaching. Examples of unfamiliar words were *jam*, *angel*, *toothbrush*, *spinach*, *church*, *couch*, *grasshopper*, *rainbow* and *snowman*. In addition, it contained sounds located in initial, middle and final position. Table 7 details the results of the pre-study and post-study assessment worksheet. The empty cells mean that those words were not assessed in the pre-study and the results show how many learners could recognise the sounds.

Table 7: Results of the recognition of sounds worksheets

SOUND	*WORD*	*PRE-STUDY*	*POST-STUDY*
/dʒ/	**Jacket**	15 students (94%)	15 students (94%)
	Giraffe	15 students (94%)	16 students (100%)
	Orange	4 students (25%)	11 students (69%)
	jam		15 students (94%)
	june		15 students (94%)
	angel		10 students (63%)
/ʃ/	**Shoes**	16 students (100%)	15 students (94%)
	t-shirt	12 students (75%)	15 students (94%)
	fish	12 students (75%)	16 students (100%)
	toothbrush		13 students (81%)
	sharpener		16 students (100%)
/tʃ/	**Chair**	14 students (88%)	16 students (100%)
	Cheese	14 students (88%)	15 students (94%)
	chicken	13 students (81%)	16 students (100%)
	chocolate		16 students (100%)
	spinach		9 students (56%)
	church		13 students (81%)
	couch		12 students (75%)
/θ/	**Mouth**	15 students (94%)	16 students (100%)
	thirty	11 students (69%)	
	thirteen		10 students (63%)
	toothbrush		11 students (69%)
	twentieth		12 students (75%)
/h/	**Hat**	13 students (81%)	16 students (100%)
	Hand	14 students (88%)	14 students (88%)
	house	12 students (75%)	16 students (100%)
	grasshopper		13 students (81%)
	unhappy		15 students (94%)
/w/	**wind**	10 students (63%)	16 students (100%)
	swim	3 students (19%)	15 students (94%)
	window	10 students (63%)	15 students (94%)
	wand		16 students (100%)
	witch		16 students (100%)
	rainbow		6 students (38%)
	snowman		9 students (56%)

According to the results detailed in Table 7 most learners could identify which pictures contained the sounds in the pre-study and post-study worksheets. Globally the sound which was more difficult to recognise was sound /w/. However in the post-study worksheet the results related to this sound increased significantly. In spite of this fact, it is important to verify that the sound /w/ of the words *rainbow* and *snowman*, in middle or final position, showed results near or below 50% even after phonics teaching. Furthermore, although learners could easily identify the addressed sounds in

initial position, it was more difficult for them to identify the sounds in middle or final position, even in familiar words, for example: *orange*. In fact, only six and nine learners, from a total of 16, could recognise the phoneme /w/ in *rainbow* and *snowman*, in final and middle position respectively. This fact parallels the results of the audio recordings (Tables 1 to 6), where the phonemes located in middle and final position were produced by fewer learners. A possible explanation could be the fact that the phoneme in middle or final position could be hidden by the articulation of the previous syllable. This will be further discussed in the final section.

It was interesting to verify that even though 13 learners could identify the sound /h/ in *grasshoppers* (Table 7), Table 5 shows that only 2 learners could produce the sound. Several learners instead of /h/ produced the sound /ʃ/. According to my analysis this could have happened because in this word the letter "h" is next to an "s", which could be confused with the cluster "sh". In addition, the recognition of the sound /w/ in *swim* markedly increased from 19% to 94% (Table 7), in pre-study and post-study results respectively. A possible explanation for this increase is the fact that the post-study worksheet included pictures labelled with their written forms, which can scaffold the recognition of the sound after the phonics teaching.

II. 3.3 Teacher's journal

At the first lesson of phonics teaching, learners were interested but they were also quite puzzled probably because they were not familiar with the teaching of sounds (Teacher's journal, 26/10/2017). However, gradually they became very interested, participative and eager to identify the sounds in new words "suggesting with enthusiasm words containing the sounds we were learning". (Teacher's journal, 16/11/2017) Each time I introduced a new sound they immediately tried to think about words they were familiar with which contained the same sound to suggest. However, for some learners this task was more difficult.

According to my observation, the tongue twisters (Appendix E) were an important tool in the phonics teaching; the sound was introduced in a meaningful context and practised in a funny way. In fact, "learners understood the Holly and Harry tongue twister and found funny to practise it in two teams; one team asking the

question and the other team answering it" (Teacher's journal, 03/11/2017). Moreover, not only did the tongue twisters provide practise in pronunciation and identification of the sounds but they also provided practise in relating the sounds with their written form, assisting the phonics teaching. After saying the tongue twisters, learners had to colour or circle the sound or sounds in the tongue twister, making the correspondence between the sound and the letter or cluster. It helped learners to recognise the letter or cluster of letters related to each taught sound. According to my teacher's journal, "all learners could identify and colour the sound /h/ represented by letter h" (03/11/2017). Nevertheless, in the case of the sounds in middle or final position I had to give them hints to help them to remember that some sounds can be found in several positions. As an illustration, "when colouring the sound /tʃ/ in middle position some learners could not colour in autonomously. They could only identify it when I stressed the sound in *marching*" (Teacher's journal, 14/11/2017).

The "Jolly phonics" songs (Appendix D) were also very important to introduce the sounds and to teach the gesture related to each one of the sounds. They provided practise in identifying and producing the sounds. Learners were able to sing the songs related to each sound perfectly, associating the gesture each time they produced the sound. Once they became aware of the sounds, the gesture related to a specific sound was "a valuable corrective feedback tool to elicit correct pronunciation" (Teacher's journal, 09/11/2017). Furthermore, learners learned the songs very quickly and I was surprised by the fact that "they could remember and sing the songs gladly and better than me" (Teacher's journal, 23/11/2017).

When we were doing tasks focused on sounds most learners could produce the sounds. However, in oral interactions some learners could not produce it. As an illustration, in spite of being able to produce the sound /h/ in /h/ead and /h/air, "Lion does not produce the sound during free oral interactions". (Teacher's journal, 16/11/2017) Nevertheless, as soon as the teacher or other classmate stressed the mistake, some learners could automatically correct the pronunciation error. The sounds /tʃ/, /θ/ and /h/ were the ones we focused more because they are more challenging to young EFL learners. Actually, it was remarkable to notice that while learning the human body "the pronunciation of the words *head* and *hand* is being

improved by learners' increasing awareness of the sound" (Teacher's journal, 09/11/2017). Moreover, the increasing awareness of the sounds encouraged self-correction even in cases of "overcompensation" (Shepherd, 1991: 92). As an illustration, "Duffy duck said /h/arm and immediately self-corrected and pronounced arm" (Teacher's journal, 09/11/2017).

II. 4 Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore the use of phonics teaching in EFL classrooms and its influence on young EFL learners' pronunciation, focusing on the perception and production of the phonemes /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/, /w/. In this section, the results of my research will be discussed and a conclusion will be provided.

II. 4.1 Recognition of sounds

Analysing the results from the worksheets to assess the recognition of sounds, it can be argued that most learners could recognise the sounds addressed by my research, in initial position. However, in middle and final position, the number of learners who could recognise the sound was inferior, both in the pre-study test and the post-study test. This finding was also corroborated by the practise in tongue twisters, relating a specific sound to a letter or a cluster. When learners were asked to circle or colour the letters or cluster related to sounds in middle position, some of them needed help from the teacher. As an illustration, learners needed some hints when they were asked to colour the sound /tʃ/ in the tongue-twister "Where are Charlie and Charlotte?". (Teacher's journal, 14/11/2017)

A possible explanation for this evidence could lie on language constraints. As suggested by Kochetov (2004: 380), regarding perception, there is a "common maintenance of the contrasts in syllables onsets" and a "common neutralization in syllables codas". This means that, on the one hand, the distinction of the phonemes is better perceived at the beginning of the syllable (onset) and, on the other hand, when the phoneme is in syllable final position (coda), the distinction which allows its perception is reduced. Both syllables onset and coda are consonants or consonants clusters sounds (Carr, 2008). As referred by Duanmu (2015: 219) a contrast "is a difference between two sounds that can distinguish words in a language". Kochetov's

statement (2004) could explain the poorer recognition of the phonemes /w/ in *swim* and *rainbow,* and /tʃ/ in *spinach*. Moreover, learners start to decode words from left to right, which could be the reason why the phonemes placed on syllables onsets in word-initial context have a superior recognition rate. In fact, the phonemes in syllable onset but in middle-word position could be hindered by the previous syllable. Probably, the inferior perception of phoneme /tʃ/ in the word *marching* in the referred tongue twister could be due to this. Despite the finding relating a poorer perception of phonemes in middle and final position (Table 7), results prior to the phonics instruction were slightly inferior than results of the post-study.

This could indicate a positive effect of phonics instruction in recognising the sounds. Assuming, as stated in the literature review, that orthographic input can help to notice sounds that are difficult to perceive (Basseti, 2009) and that the recognition of a sound is a precondition to producing it (Ioup, 2009), this is a good predictor of the production of these phonemes.

II. 4.2 Production of sounds

The data gathered through the audio recording detected different levels of production, depending on the sounds. In general, learners showed correct pronunciation of phonemes /w/ and /ʃ/ (Tables 6 and 2), both in pre and post-study audio recordings. The sound /dʒ/ (Table 1) showed a slight increase in the accuracy of pronunciation from the pre-study to the post-study audio recording. The most notable increase was with the words *giraffe* and *orange.* In the pre-study learners substituted this phoneme with the phoneme /ʒ/ due to L1 interference (Ohala, 2008), which is in line with Basseti's argument (2009), about a possible negative impact of L1 orthographic input in pronunciation. On the other hand, the incorrect pronunciation of the sound/dʒ/ in *vegetables*, in syllable coda, is in line with data gathered in the recognition of sounds, discussed in the previous section. If learners could not notice those phonemes, probably because they were neutralized due to its coda location and they were hindered by the syllable onset, it is unsurprising that they cannot produce it.

Unsurprisingly, in general, the production of the sounds /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/ was low. These phonemes are in general more challenging to Portuguese EFL learners, as

mentioned by Shepherd (1991) and highlighted in the literature review. Fewer than half the learners could produce the /tʃ/, /θ/ and /h/ (Tables 3, 4 and 5) before the phonics instruction, except the word *mouth*, probably because it is a very familiar word. After the phonics instruction the numbers of learners able to pronounce these sounds increased in relation to the vocabulary from the pre-study. These results correlate with Ibarrola's (2007) suggestion that phonics teaching may have a positive impact in pronunciation. In addition, they are in line with findings from previous researchers. Indeed, Tomás (2016), Beltrán-Herrera et al. (2016) and Martinez (2011) concluded that phonics teaching had a positive effect on pronunciation.

Regarding the pronunciation of unfamiliar words containing the sounds /tʃ/, /θ/ and /h/, audio recorded only in the post-study and prompted by sentences, there were slight differences depending on the sound, with the greatest increase in the correct pronunciation being seen with the sound /h/. However, it is important to note that the sounds /h/ and /θ/ were the ones which were most practised, not only because learners had most difficulty with these sounds but also because they were the ones more commonly used in the classroom in everyday activities. Results below 31% were obtained in words with the phoneme in middle and final position – *couch*, *marching*, *church* and *toothbrush* – in line with the results obtained in phoneme /dʒ/.

During the audio recordings, several learners could not remember some of the words elicited by pictures and they had to resort to the written input in order to remember the word. In fact, the written input helped learners to activate the memory. As stated in the results section, when learners were exposed to the written input and could pronounce the phoneme correctly, they could accurately pronounce it when exposed again to the picture. However, if the learners could not pronounce the phoneme while reading the written input, they could not produce it accurately when exposed to the picture. Although in some cases the written input led to the substitution of the L2 phoneme by the one orthographically represented by the consonant or consonant cluster in L1, in other case it helped a learner to try to produce the sound /h/. Bearing in mind the opacity of the English language this finding corroborates the importance of learners being able to pronounce correctly the written words. In fact, these results confirm that, as argued by Basseti (2009), the orthographic

input can have a positive effect in pronunciation but, due to L1 orthographic interference, can also lead to incorrect pronunciation. Considering that, as mentioned in the introduction, incorrect pronunciation can hamper communication, which can be frustrating to learners (Kelly, 2000), and considering that in addition to vocabulary learned in the classroom context, learners encounter new vocabulary autonomously also as written form, the incorrect pronunciation of written words can lead to a fossilization of errors.

II. 4.3 Additional findings

The use of a gesture related to a specific sound turned out to be an excellent tool to promote self-correction of the pronunciation of sounds. In fact, during the second lesson of phonics teaching "I noticed that the gesture helps to elicit the sound when learners do not produce the sound". (Teacher's journal, 02/11/2017) Besides other benefits, Darwish & Region (2008: 11) argue that gestures can improve "self and peer correction". During the phonics teaching, this tool was used not only by the teacher, but also by learners. Learners resorted to the gesture associated to the sound to encourage their peers to correct the incorrect pronunciation of the sounds.

II. 4.4 Conclusion

This study has investigated the influence of phonics teaching in the pronunciation of the sounds /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, /h/ and /w/. According to these research project findings, it might be concluded that the raising of learners' awareness to the sounds, the use of phonics instructions and the use of gestures to elicit self-correction of pronunciation of some sounds can have a positive impact on the pronunciation of young EFL learners. However, taking into account that "some learners can produce the sounds when they are working on them but they do not always produce the sound during free oral interaction" (Teacher's journal, 16/11/207) it would be interesting to carry out the audio recordings during free oral interactions to verify if the results would be different from the ones obtained through the controlled audio recordings. Moreover, it would be useful to verify if a longer period of practise in phonics teaching would reveal different results. Bearing in mind that this group of learners has had English since pre-school, it would also be interesting to verify the

influence of phonics teaching on the pronunciation of a young EFL learners group of beginners, without previous knowledge of the language.

Considering that I am a non-native teacher, pronunciation is one of my concerns in my teaching practise. Indeed, Brewster et al. (2002: 80) state that, concerning pronunciation, the main model of young EFL learners is the teacher and they must "achieve a reasonable level of intelligibility". This means that their speech must be understood by native speakers. Moreover, helping my learners to achieve the best pronunciation possible is also a concern. On the one hand, I am aware that some sounds are more difficult to teach as a non-native teacher. In fact, although "I noticed that learners had some pronunciation issues in words such as pear, because of the sound /ea/, as well as in short and long vowels" (Teaching journal, 17/10/2017), it can be complicated for non-native teachers to teach sounds which are also difficult to perceive and to pronounce by them. In addition, Kelly (2000: 13) hypothesises that regarding pronunciation teaching, teachers may have "a feeling of doubts as to how to teach it". On the other hand, being a Portuguese non-native speaker of English, I understand the difficulties that Portuguese learners can face when learning English as a foreign language. In addition, in the search of strategies for help learners to improve pronunciation, teachers can also learn and improve their own pronunciation. Hence, raising learners' awareness to sounds implies that the non-native teachers are also improving their own awareness to sounds.

Finally, bearing in mind that studies focused on pronunciation problems of European Portuguese learners are scarce I hope that my research will provide some evidence for further research.

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LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. Letter of consent – parents

PEDIDO DE AUTORIZAÇÃO AOS ENCARREGADOS DE EDUCAÇÃO

Caros pais e encarregados de educação,

O meu nome é Ana Elisa Matos e tenho vindo, desde meados de fevereiro do corrente ano, a realizar o meu estágio em ensino com o seu educando. No âmbito do meu relatório final de estágio do Mestrado em ensino de Inglês no 1º ciclo na Universidade Nova intitulado ***Influence of phonics teaching in young EFL learners' pronunciation*** (Influência do ensino de *phonics* na pronúncia do Inglês como língua estrangeira dos *young learners*), venho por este meio, solicitar autorização para poder incluir o seu educando neste estudo. Este estudo decorrerá entre outubro e dezembro de 2017.

Depois de pedir autorização ao seu educando para o/a incluir no meu estudo, a recolha de dados será realizada mediante observação dos alunos, gravações áudio de produções orais dos alunos e fichas de trabalho para avaliar a sua capacidade em identificar os fonemas a trabalhar. Os dados serão recolhidos no início do estudo, a meio do estudo e no final do estudo. A qualquer momento o seu educando poderá deixar de participar no estudo.

As informações recolhidas serão referidas no meu relatório final de mestrado e, eventualmente, em artigos académicos e conferências. **A instituição e os alunos permanecerão anónimos em qualquer circunstância.**

Se tiver questões a colocar, agradeço que me contacte através do e-mail: a.matos1@campus.ul.pt.

Agradeço que até ao dia 03 de outubro de 2017 me conceda a autorização para proceder à implementação do estudo em causa, permitindo que o seu educando participe no meu projeto de estudo.

Oeiras, 25 de setembro de 2017
Ana Elisa Matos

Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie
Orientadora de Estágio
FCSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa

_____ _____

Eu, _____, encarregado de educação de _____

declaro que fui informado(a) dos objectivos do estudo intitulado ***Influence of phonics teaching in young EFL learners' pronunciation*** (Influência do ensino de *phonics* na pronúncia do Inglês como língua estrangeira dos *young learners*), e autorizo o meu educando a participar no estudo.

Data: _____

Assinatura: _____

APPENDIX B. Letter of consent – learners

Convite para participares no meu estudo

Querido(a) aluno(a), quero fazer-te um convite.

Como sabes, o meu nome é Ana Matos. Já trabalhámos juntos no ano passado, nas aulas de Inglês. Tal como tu, também estou a estudar!

Para aprender a ser uma melhor professora de Inglês, estou a fazer um Mestrado na Faculdade e preciso da tua ajuda para participares num projeto. Este projeto é importante para mim e também é importante para ti e para outros alunos, porque pode ajudar-te a falar melhor em Inglês.

Até Dezembro vais aprender canções, gestos e símbolos novos para alguns sons difíceis de pronunciar em Inglês. Vais preencher algumas fichas e vou também gravar a tua voz a falar em Inglês. Se quiseres, depois podes ouvir o que gravaste. Vais ver que é divertido ☺

No final do projeto, vou analisar toda a informação que recolhi das atividades que fizemos e escrever um relatório final de mestrado. Os teus pais já sabem que vamos fazer este projeto na sala de aula.

O teu nome não vai aparecer no meu Relatório, vai aparecer o teu nome de código!
Deves escolher e escrever um nome de código em Inglês que pode ser um animal, um objeto, uma comida, um super-herói. Tu decides!

Espero poder contar com a tua ajuda, mas se não quiseres participar não há qualquer problema. Can you help me, please ? ☺

Se tiveres alguma dúvida, podes vir falar comigo quando quiseres.

Thank You!

.....

Eu, _____, aluno do 4º ano do Externato Nova Oeiras:

Quero participar no projeto da prof. Ana Matos ☺

Não quero participar no projeto da prof. Ana Matos ☹

O meu nome de código é _____

Data: _____

Assinatura: _____

APPENDIX C. Letter of consent – school director

Pedido de autorização à Diretora do Externato Nova Oeiras

Exma. Sra. Diretora Ana Paula Novo,

O meu nome é Ana Elisa Matos e é com muito gosto que irei voltar a estagiar na sua instituição, com os alunos do 4.º ano, durante o 1º período deste ano letivo.

Estou a fazer um Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo na Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas na Universidade Nova de Lisboa, e este implica que durante o estágio faça um pequeno projeto de investigação. Este projeto será incluído no meu relatório final, e intitula-se ***Influence of phonics teaching in young EFL learners' pronunciation*** (Influência do ensino de *phonics* na pronúncia do Inglês como língua estrangeira dos *young learners*).

Venho, por este meio, solicitar a sua autorização para incluir os alunos da turma do 4.º ano do Externato Nova Oeiras neste projeto que vai decorrer entre setembro e dezembro de 2017, durante o meu estágio.

Depois de pedir autorização aos alunos e encarregados de educação da referida turma para os incluir no meu estudo, a recolha de dados será efetuada mediante observação dos alunos, gravações áudio de produções orais dos alunos e fichas de trabalho para avaliar a sua capacidade em identificar os fonemas a trabalhar. A qualquer momento os alunos podem escolher não participar. As informações recolhidas serão referidas no meu relatório final de mestrado e, eventualmente, em artigos académicos e conferências.

A instituição, todos os seus funcionários e as crianças permanecerão anónimas em qualquer circunstância.

Se tiver questões a colocar, agradeço que me contacte através do e-mail: a.matos1@campus.ul.pt.

Agradeço que autorize a participação dos alunos da turma identificada no meu estudo. Pelo que peço que me entregue esta autorização assinada, se possível até 02 de outubro (segunda-feira).

Oeiras, 25 de setembro de 2017
Ana Elisa Matos

Prof.ª Doutora Carolyn Leslie
Orientadora de Estágio
FCSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa

_____ _____

.....

Eu, _____

Diretora do Externato Nova Oeiras, declaro que fui informada dos objetivos do projeto intitulado ***Influence of phonics teaching in young EFL learners' pronunciation*** (Influência do ensino de *phonics* na pronúncia do Inglês como língua estrangeira dos *young learners*) e autorizo os alunos da turma do 4.º ano do Externato Nova Oeiras a participar no estudo.

Data: _____

Assinatura: _____

APPENDIX D. Jolly phonics songs and gestures associated to sounds

Sound /w/

Song:
I see the clouds moving,
/w/, /w/, /w/.
I see the kites flying,
/w/, /w/, /w/.
I see the trees bending,
/w/, /w/, /w/.
The **wind** is blowing strong!

Gesture: Blow onto your hand, as if you are the wind, and say */w/, /w/, /w/.*

Sound /h/

Song:
I like to **hop, hop, hop**,
up and down.
I like to **hop, hop. hop**,
all around.
I like to **hop, hop, hop**,
up and down -
/h/, /h/, /h/, /h/, /h/!

Gesture: Hold a hand up to your mouth, panting as if you are out of breath, and say */h/, /h/, /h/, /h/.*

Sound /tʃ/

Song:
Trains are **chugging**
Up the hill.
/ch/ - /ch/ - /ch/,
/ch/ - /ch/ - /ch/.
Trains are **chugging**
Up the hill.
/ch/ - /ch/ - /ch/,
Choo, choo!

Gesture: Move your arms at your sides, as if you are a train, and say */tʃ/, /tʃ/, /tʃ/, /tʃ/.*

Sound /θ/

Song:
Did you ever hear
a rude clown
make this sound
and that sound?
Did you ever hear
a rude clown
say /th/-/th/, **/th/-/th/**?

Gesture: Pretend to be a rude clown and stick out your tongue, and say /θ/, /θ/, /θ/, /θ/.

Sound /dʒ/

Song:
Jelly and **jam**,
jelly and **jam**,
jiggling on the plate.
Oh, what will I eat with it?
/j/ - /j/ - /j/ - /j/ - /j/.

Gesture: Pretend to wobble on a plate, and say /dʒ/, /dʒ/, /dʒ/,/dʒ/.

Sound /ʃ/

Song:
Hush! Hush! Hush!
Don't make a sound.
Be as quiet
as you can be.
The baby's asleep
and I'm tired out.
Sh! /sh/ - /sh/ - /sh/ - /sh/!
Gesture: Place your index finger over your lips, and say /ʃ/, /ʃ/, /ʃ/, /ʃ/.

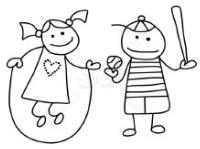
Source: Jolly phonics songs (Lloyd, S., & Wernham, S., 2017)

APPENDIX E. Tongue-twisters

Tongue twister related to sound /w/

Source: Lindade, Botelho & Lucas (2016)

Tongue twister related to sound /h/



HOW ARE HOLLY AND HARRY?
HOLLY AND HARRY ARE HAPPY BUT HUNGRY.

Name_____

Tongue twister related to sound /tʃ/

WHERE ARE CHARLIE AND CHARLOTTE?
CHARLIE AND CHARLOTTE ARE TOUCHING THEIR CHINS.

Name_____

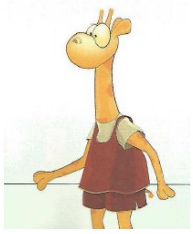
Tongue twister related to sound /θ/

THEO'S BIRTHDAY IS ON THURSDAY.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Name_____

Tongue twister related to sound /dʒ/

OH NO! GIRAFFES ARE JUMPING AND TOUCHING THEIR HEADS IN THE GYM.



Name_____

Lindade, Botelho & Lucas (2016). Abridged.

Tongue twister related to sound /ʃ/

SHE SELLS SEA SHELLS
ON THE SEASHORE.

Name_____

Dooley & Evans (2013). Abridged.

APPENDIX F. Lesson Plan - Phonics teaching

FCSH FACULDADE DE CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS E HUMANAS UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

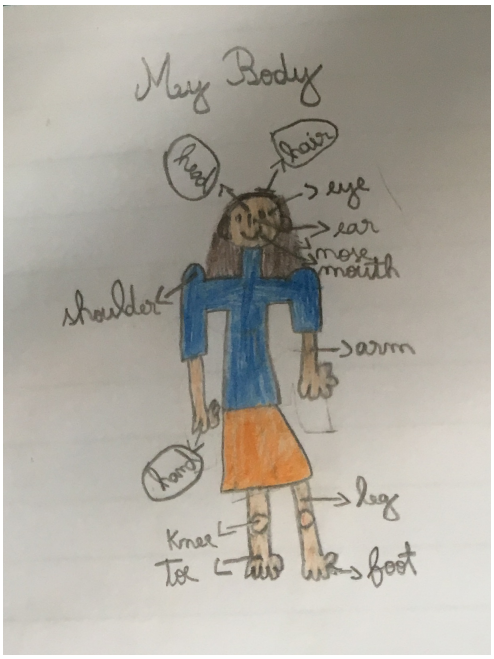
Lesson Plan

Trainee – Ana Elisa Matos	Co-op–
Class – 4th Grade	Class size: 16 students
Date – Tuesday, 14th November 2017	Level

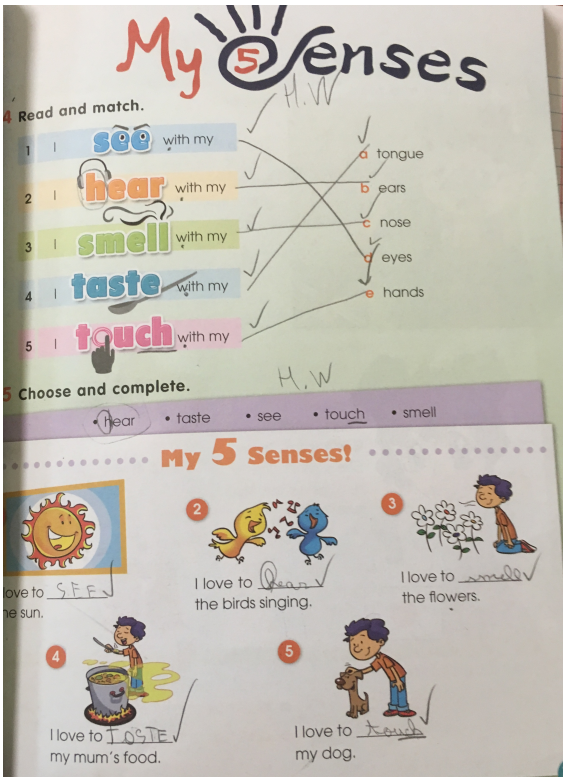
Action research	Transition	1. T points to the chin (drawing) on the board and elicits the word. Ss try to answer. If they don't know T says "it's a chin.", "Touch your chin" touching her chin. Ss repeat and touch their chins.	T-Ss
	Phonics Teaching	2. T stresses the sound /tʃ/ in chin and asks Ss if they know another word with that sound (*pointing to her to elicit the word teacher and pointing to a chair to elicit the word).*	T-Ss
		3. T tells students they are going to listen to a song and learn a tongue twister related to that sound.	
		3. T. plays the song from Jolly Phonics with the sound /tʃ/. Ss listen.	Whole class
		4. T plays again the song miming the gesture when the sound appears.	T-Ss
		5. Ss sing the song miming the gesture of the song.	Whole class
		6. T says the tongue twister "Charlie and Charlotte" and asks Ss if they can identify words containing the sound /tʃ/. Ss answer.	T-Ss
		7. T. hands out a worksheet with the tongue twister "Charlie and Charlotte".	

		(Worksheet Charlie and Charlotte)	
	To practise and foster students' production of the sound	8. T and Ss repeat the tongue twister, miming the gesture /tʃ/.	Whole class
		9. T divides the class in two. One group says the question; the other group says the answer, making the gestures. Then they swop.	
		10. T asks Ss to mime the gesture they learnt when they produce the sound /tʃ/.	T-Ss
	To foster students' identification of the sound in its written form	11. T asks Ss to colour the letters which represents the sound /tʃ/. Ss colour the letters and the teacher goes around monitoring the activity.	Ss (ind.)
		12. T asks if there are any other sounds they already know, eliciting the /w/. Ss answer	T-Ss
		13. T asks Ss to colour the letter which represents the sound /w/ in red. Ss colour.	Ss ind.
		14. T asks Ss to write their names on the tongue twister and to give her back the worksheet.	T-Ss
	To provide the written support of the song and tongue twister	15. T hands out to Ss a small worksheet with both the song and the tongue twister. Ss glue it on their notebooks. *(Action research students)*	Ss (ind.)
		16. T counts down to settle Ss.	T
		16. T and Ss repeat both the song and the tongue twister, miming the /w/, /h/ and /tʃ/.	Whole class

APPENDIX G. Examples of everyday activities



Instruction: Circle words containing sound /h/



Instructions:

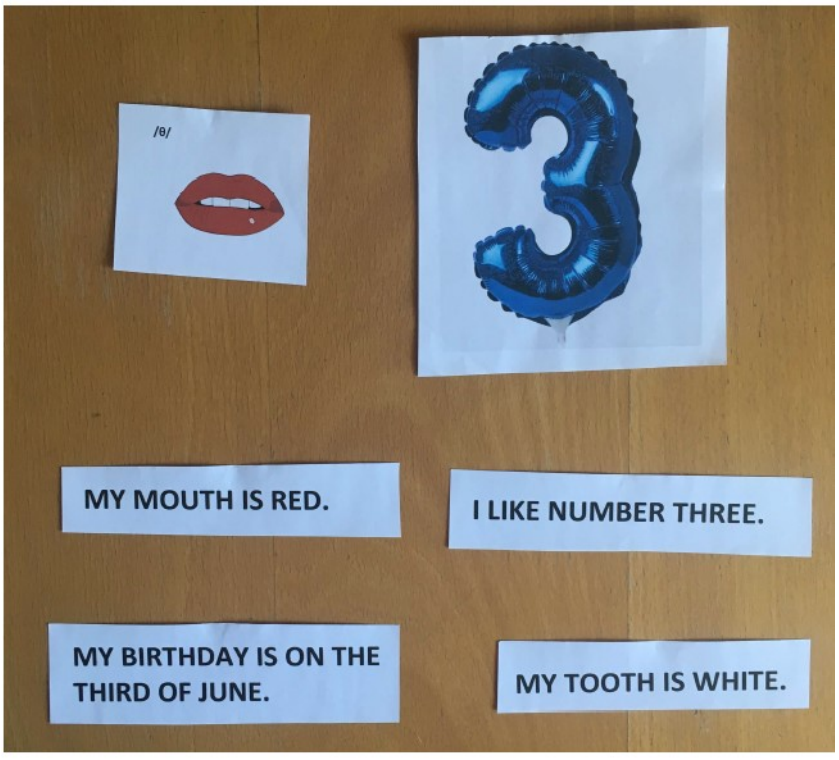
Circle sound /h/

Underline sound /tʃ/

Draw a dot under sound /w/

APPENDIX H. Audio recording input – pre-study

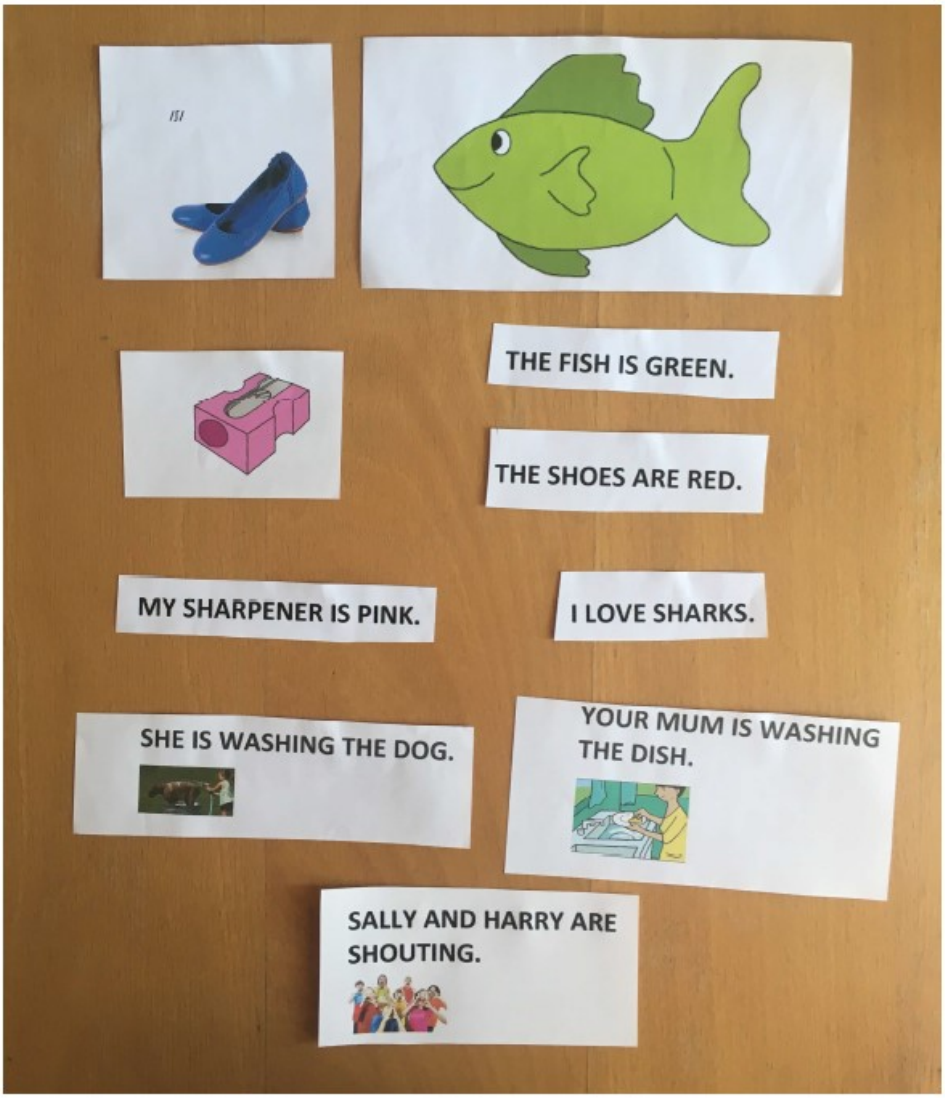

/ʧ/
THE CHAIR IS BROWN.
I LIKE CHEESE.
I DON'T LIKE CHIPS.
THE COUCH IS PURPLE.


/θ/
MY MOUTH IS RED.
I LIKE NUMBER THREE.
MY BIRTHDAY IS ON THE THIRD OF JUNE.
MY TOOTH IS WHITE.

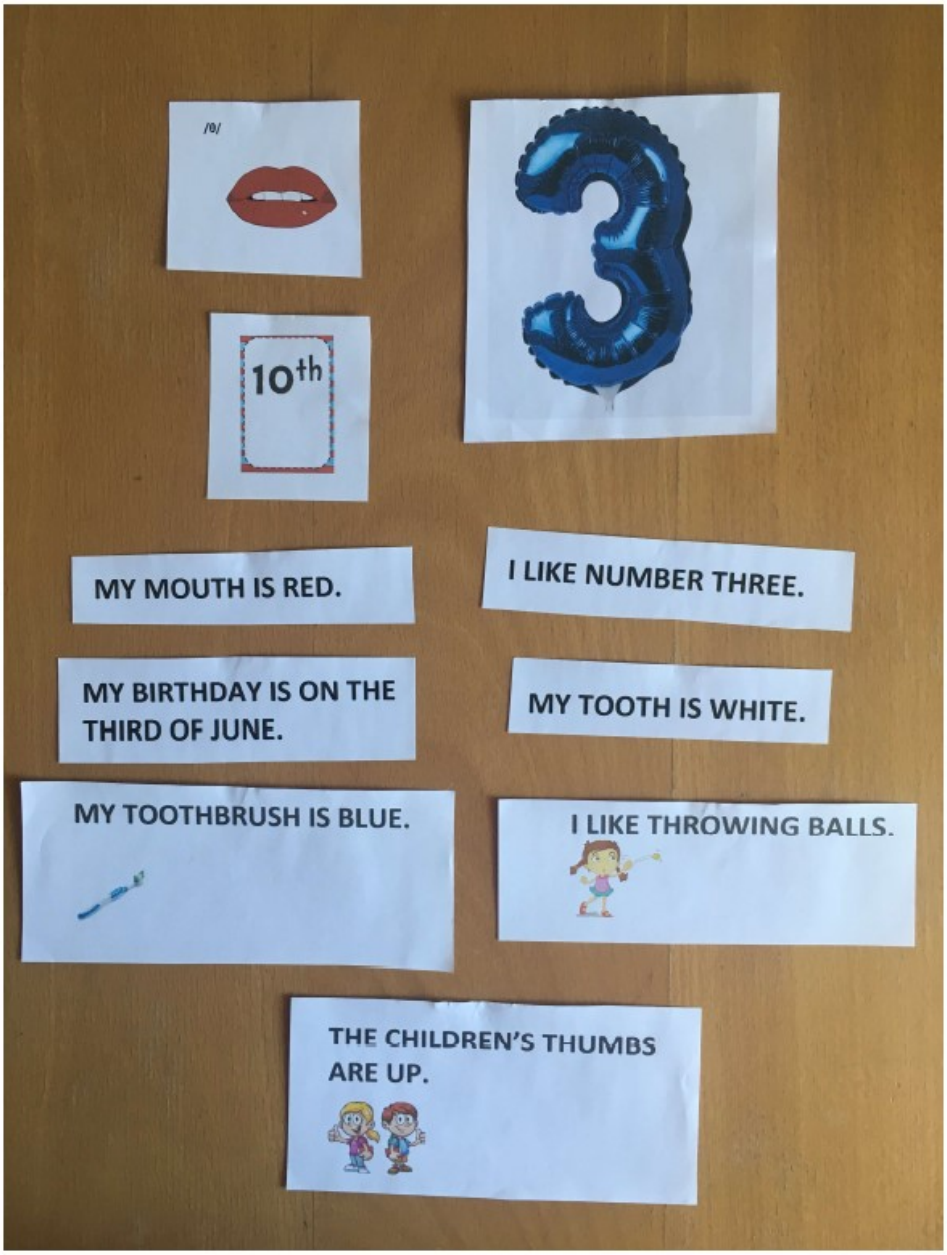

/h/
YOUR HAT IS PINK.
MY HOUSE IS BLUE.
HELLO! HOW ARE YOU?
I'M HAPPY TODAY.


/w/
I SWIM ON MONDAYS.
MY CAT IS WHITE.
IN WINTER IT RAINS.
THE WEATHER IS WARM.

APPENDIX I. Audio recording input – post-study


THE FISH IS GREEN.
THE SHOES ARE RED.
MY SHARPENER IS PINK.
I LOVE SHARKS.
SHE IS WASHING THE DOG.
YOUR MUM IS WASHING THE DISH.
SALLY AND HARRY ARE SHOUTING.


THE CHAIR IS BROWN.
I LIKE CHEESE.
I DON'T LIKE CHIPS.
THE COUCH IS PURPLE.
THE CHURCH IS SMALL.
THE CHILDREN ARE MARCHING.
THE CHEETAH RUNS FAST.


/θ/
10th
MY MOUTH IS RED.
I LIKE NUMBER THREE.
MY BIRTHDAY IS ON THE THIRD OF JUNE.
MY TOOTH IS WHITE.
MY TOOTHBRUSH IS BLUE.
I LIKE THROWING BALLS.
THE CHILDREN'S THUMBS ARE UP.


/h/
YOUR HAT IS PINK.
HELLO! HOW ARE YOU?
MY HOUSE IS BLUE.
I'M HAPPY TODAY.
GRASSHOPPERS CAN HOP.
HIPPOS ARE HEAVY.
I'VE GOT TWO HANDS.


I SWIM ON MONDAYS.
IN WINTER IT RAINS.
MY CAT IS WHITE.
THE WEATHER IS WARM.
THE WITCH IS FLYING ON THE BROOM.
WHALES CAN SWIM.
THE SWANS ARE IN THE LAKE.
TWIGS ARE BROWN.

APPENDIX J. Pre-study worksheets

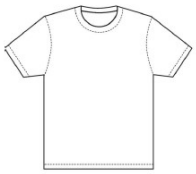
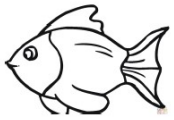
Look and circle the /dʒ/ words.




Name_____

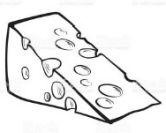
Look and circle the /ʃ/ words.

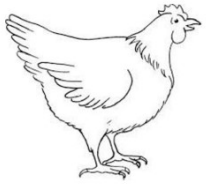


Name_____

Look and circle the /tʃ/ words.

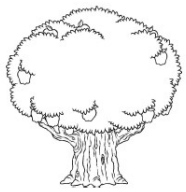





Name_____

Look and circle the /θ/ words.



Name_____

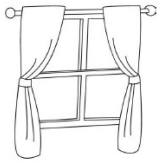
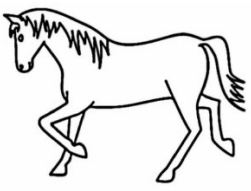
Look and circle the /h/ words.




Name_____

Look and circle the /w/ words.



Name_____

APPENDIX K. Lesson Plan – pre-study assessment worksheets

Encounter, Engage, and Exploit 10-15 min	Transition	1. T. thanks Ss and asks students if they can remember the topic of the project they are helping her to do. Ss answers.	T-Ss
		2. T. explains Ss that they are going to complete a worksheet related to sounds, explaining that it is part of the project they are helping to carry out.	T
Action research	To complete worksheet related to the research project	2. To be less time consuming T explains Ss in L1 that they must look at the pictures, listen to the sound and circle pictures containing that sound she is going to make.	
		3. T asks a volunteer to explain the task to check their understanding.	T/S-Ss
		4. T hand out the worksheet related to sound /dʒ/.	T-Ss (ind)
		5. T makes the sound. Ss complete worksheet.	
		5. Following the same procedure. T. hands out each one of the worksheets (6 in total).	
		6. T thanks Ss for their cooperation and asks them to give her the completed worksheets. Ss give T the worksheets.	T-Ss

APPENDIX L. Post-study worksheets

Look and circle the /dʒ/ words.

orange

jam

jacket

June

giraffe

angel

Look and circle the /ʃ/ words.

shoes

T-shirt

toothbrush

fish

skirt

sharpener

Name_____

Look and circle the /tʃ/ words.

couch

church

spinach

chair

cheese

chocolate

chicken

Look and circle the /θ/ words.

mouse

toothbrush

thirteen

tree

twentieth

mouth

Name_____

Look and circle the /h/ words.


arm


hat


hand


grasshopper


apple


unhappy


house

Look and circle the /w/ words.


Wand


wind


witch


rainbow


swim


snowman


window

Name_____

APPENDIX M. Teacher's journal